



BULLETIN

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF WILMETTE

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League of Women Voters
of Wilmette

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DEMOCRACY IS NOT A SPECTATOR SPORT

THE FEDERAL ROLE IN EDUCATION COMING TO CONSENSUS

In the past several weeks, the Wilmette League has been organizing subgroups to research what the federal role in education should be. Therese Steinken and Lali Watt are chairing this ambitious effort and have formed three committees of researchers.

The Historical Perspective: Trudy Gibbs, Beth Nyhan, and Lesley Green

Common Core Standards & Assessments: Lali Watt, Saima Abassi, Cinda Axley and
Therese Steinken

Funding & Equity Issues: Gail Thomason, Trish Nealon, Joyce Pollack, Mimi Rodman,
Libby Bankoff and Georgia Gebhardt

The study groups are currently researching the questions provided by the national League. Members can join in by visiting www.LWVUS.org, where there are summary articles on the main topics and a list of the consensus questions. And of course, we welcome anyone who would like to join a study group. This is the "mother of all topics," and we can certainly use the help!

On **Monday, November 14, from 10:00-2:00**, we will meet at the Wilmette Public Library and attempt to come to consensus on the fifteen questions. Study groups will present their information, and members will have a chance to ask questions and to express their views. The facilitator will maintain the group's focus and ensure that everyone has a chance to be heard. A recorder will take notes to document the results of the consensus process, which will then be reported to the Wilmette LWV Board for approval before submission to the national study committee.

When all the local Leagues have sent in their results, the national committee will deliberate and produce the final position which will be the basis for any League action on the issue. It is not an exaggeration to say that the credibility of the League rests on this study process. Becoming informed before taking a position has been a hallmark of the League since its founding.

Do plan to join us for a close examination of this topic that is so crucial to us all.

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

What happened to September I have no idea, but October finds the Wilmette League fully engaged. The nine (yes, nine) new members of our Board are already making many terrific contributions to our work. The League of Student & Government Leaders is underway and better than ever, plus we will be doing three studies during the year: the Role of the Federal Government in Education Policy, Privatization in the Federal Government, and Pension Reform in the State of Illinois. In addition, we have been watching the progress of the LWVIL vs. Governor Quinn lawsuit, which involves the current General Assembly redistricting maps.

We hope that many members will participate in one or more of the studies. Even if your time is limited, I would encourage you to go to the LWVUS website (www.lwvus.org) and read the summary pieces on the Education study, which is our current focus. This will make the process more meaningful to you. We will be sending out particulars soon on the consensus meeting, which is tentatively scheduled for November 14 at the Wilmette Public Library. In the meantime, look for the article on the consensus process in this bulletin.

To facilitate communication about the studies and other activities, we have added a presence on Facebook. I may be more comfortable with runners and passenger pigeons than with Google Docs, but this week will find me, with a few other Board members, being gently coached into the 21st century by our publicity chair, Trish Nealon. So you see, you can teach an old dog new tricks. But can you get her to “tweet”? Stay tuned.

And as always, if you have questions/suggestions, contact either Libby or me. We'd love to hear from you!

Libby Bankoff: Lbankoff@sbcglobal.net, 256-7509

Georgia Gebhardt: gtgebhardt@comcast.net, 853-82225

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF WILMETTE BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2011-2012

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League of Student and Government Leaders Co-Chairs	Lali Watt, Saima Abbasi		

2011-12 League of Student and Government Leaders

Our program got off to a great start this week. Wilmette Junior High Students are divided into two groups. One group is working with School District 39 and met with Eighth Grade Assistant Principal Kelly Jackson and Melanie Horowitz, Administrator for Curriculum and Instruction. The second group is working with the Village of Wilmette and met with the Assistant to the Village Manager, John Prejzner.

LWV Wilmette Board Member Trudy Gibbs observed the District 39 meeting and filed this report.

Assistant Principal Jackson put the students right to work learning about the roles and responsibilities of elected officials and appointed managers with three exercises.

In the first exercise, students collaboratively performed a scavenger hunt online and on paper. They began by logging District 39's Web site. Students scrolled through human resource listings to find pictures and job descriptions of the people they will represent at the mock board meeting in October, along with those for other managers. Students performed a parallel exercise to get to know elected officials on the Board of Education. This virtual paper chase was a fun and engaging way to for students to learn about the adults' roles and responsibilities.

- Another enlightening exercise was a "guess who I am" game. Some students became specific government leaders by having titles pinned to their backs; they then had to figure out who they were by asking fellow classmates questions about their positions. Throughout, Ms Jackson stressed the separation in roles and responsibilities between elected and appointed leaders (elected officials vote and appointed officials provide professional expertise and advice).
- A final exercise divided the students into their respective groups—Board of Education members or professional managers. Students prepared questions to ask their mentors before the official Board meeting next Monday night. Without prompting, the students set up a Google Docs document, identified a secretary, and collaboratively came up with a creative list of questions. It was impressive to see how easily they put the school's hardware and cloud-based technology to use.

Beyond roles and responsibilities, this year the students are studying the ramifications (costs and benefits) of a new science laboratory. To introduce the topic, Ms Kelly again directed the students to the WJHS Web site to study three Board of Education documents containing information about the proposal. Students formed three groups for this task, each studying one of the documents. A student spokesperson summarized the reports, and the beginnings of a pro and con discussion followed.

Roles, responsibilities, content, and a glimpse at procedures will all come together on Monday 9/26, when students with Board of Education roles will observe an actual board meeting. At the meeting, a consultant will report his recommendations for updating the science labs. LWV representatives have prepared a set of questions for the students to use during this observation to reinforce learning about meeting procedures. To introduce a deeper look at procedures, an upcoming workshop on Robert's Rules of Order will be run as an open-ended exploration. The goal is to help students see the rules as an organized way to manage, document, and efficiently run a public meeting.

WJHS League of Student and Government Leaders Meet with Mentors and Attend Board of Education Session

I continue to be impressed with the WJHS students and Kelly Jackson's leadership for the program. All of the students showed up for the session with their counterparts; and all the board members and managers attended as well. When I arrived, the students and professionals were all engaged in good give-and-take conversations. Afterward, several of the mentors went out of their way to compliment the students on their probing questions. Had I taken pictures, you would have seen that many of the students wore their League of Student and Government Leaders tee shirts.

During the actual Board meeting that the students stayed to observe, Anne Reichel, the Board of Education consultant on the science curriculum, spoke in great detail about the updated science curriculum for District 39. She explained that the major change is one of focus, that is, away from rote learning of science-related facts and toward the teaching of concepts and patterns. Students still learn the facts, but they become incidental to learning to think critically and apply what they learn. The new science curriculum incorporates writing skills so students learn to communicate their findings; standards so they learn to assess the evidence behind what they read; engineering skills to apply the learning; and a lot of hands on work to make the learning come to life. The discussion was detailed, yet the students both grasped and embraced the change that has already been introduced through 4th grade. The WJHS students regretted that change would not come fast enough for them to benefit. It will be another two years before the new curriculum reaches the 8th graders. The issue of the new science lab itself was only touched on briefly as that is what is now before the board. When Dr. Reichel was asked if physical changes were needed in the science labs itself, she was very clear that there were great deficiencies relative to safety, space, technology, and equipment.

An interesting aside for our League members who are working on the consensus reports for the Role of the Federal Government in Education, is the question of how well will students coming through the new District #39 science curriculum do on standardized tests based on rote learning? Will they meet "core standards" if implemented nationwide? I expected a question like that from the Board members, but it never came up. As presented, the new curriculum actively teaches science with the intended end result that a greater number of students will find science of interest and the learning will last longer, be more meaningful, and translate into lifelong practical applications.

Dr. Lechner acknowledged the League's role in the student government program and praised the work of the advisers and students. It was a nice nod to the League, Kelly Jackson and Melanie Horowitz.

Trudy Gibbs

League of Student and Government Leaders Program St. Joseph School and the Wilmette Public Library

Just as the WJHS students leaders learned about the Village of Wilmette and District #39 governmental organization, the St. Joseph eight grade student leaders learned on Thursday about the roles and responsibilities for the library board members and professional staff. League and Library Board member, Jan Barshis, helped out with this workshop. Ellen Clark, the Director of the Library, lead the students on a tour of the library, including some behind-the-scene places. The hit was the introduction to the new teen room at WPL and all the programs it has to offer.

In preparation for the students' mock board meeting, Ellen selected three relevant topics for the students to explore:

- 1) whether to expand the eBook offerings at the library,
- 2) whether amendments should be made to privacy policies, and
- 3) whether WPL should consider adding a butterfly garden in front of the library.

Stay tuned for developments as the students prepare. The mock board meeting itself is scheduled for **6:30 pm on October 18th**, 3rd floor. Please come or watch for a posting of times the meeting will be shown on Channel 6.

Trudy Gibbs and Saima Abbassi

LWV-ILLINOIS REDISTRICTING LAW SUIT

On Tuesday, August 16, 2011, the LWVIL filed a suit in the U.S. District Court (Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division) against Governor Patrick Quinn and other legislative leaders in Illinois for the Redistricting Plan which he signed into law on June 2, 2011, called "The General Assembly Redistricting Act of 2011."

The suit claims that the First Amendment rights of the citizens of Illinois are limited because they are not given a fair chance to select their representatives. See www.lwvil.org for more information. The full text of the lawsuit is on the website.

Ralph Martire, Center for Tax & Budget Accountability Monday, September 26, 2011-New Trier West

The following notes were taken at a session sponsored by local leagues to learn how the Illinois budget relates to equity and funding issues in education.

Only 7-9% of the education dollars come from the federal government.

Illinois has a \$16 billion deficit in a total budget of \$24 billion. This money is spent in 4 main categories: Education, Healthcare, Human Services, and Public Safety.

How did we get to this budgetary crisis?

- 1) Flawed tax policy;
- 2) Irresponsible fiscal policy.

There is a structural deficit. Revenues grow less than needed in order to maintain services.

There were three possibilities to address this situation:

- 1) Increase taxes to match costs of services.
- 2) Cut spending on services.
- 3) Do not contribute to pension funds.

The General Assembly chose option #3. In other words over several decades, legislators did not wish to increase taxes or cut services because voters would punish them at the ballot box. Therefore, they took dollars that should have been contributed to pension funds and used them to pay general state expenses. When the 2008 crisis happened, it had the effect of doubling what had already been a large deficit in what the state owed the pension funds.

In 1994, Governor Edgar pressed for a law requiring the state to begin to pay back the pension funds. The General Assembly passed the law, **but not the funding for it.**

What about the "sweet" deals that some school districts cut with staff, hiking their salaries in the last 4 years in order to increase their monthly annuities after retirement?

Martire said, while these abuses certainly need to be stopped, this is not the solution to the funding problem. The amount barely comes up to a rounding error.

Then is it Medicaid spending? Over 70% of the funding comes from the federal government through a matching funds process. If the state cuts Medicaid funding, it will lose that amount from the feds.

In 2009, Illinois was one of the biggest and richest of the states in GNP. However, our economic growth lags the nation because of a loss in manufacturing jobs. The new jobs created have been minimum wage from employers like McDonald's and Wal-Mart. 30% of Illinois citizens are either on Medicaid or uninsured.

What about the total tax burden of Illinois' citizens? Before the tax increase earlier this year, Illinois was 44th out of 50 states in total tax burden. Now we are 38th. The corporate tax is now about 7% (until 2014). It was a little over 4% before the hike.

How does that compare with other states?

Indiana	8.5%
New Jersey	9 %
Wisconsin	7.9%

It should be noted that these tax levels have been this high in other states for years.

What is high in Illinois is the property tax. Illinois ranks 49th out of 50 states in the State's support of education. That means the property tax has to make up the difference.

1990-2007-Property taxes grew at a rate 10X the rate of income growth.

Continued on the next page

How are school districts in Illinois funded? There are 3 levels:

- 1) Flat grant Districts (e.g. New Trier). 83% of funds from property taxes.
- 2) Alternative Districts-
- 3) Foundation Grant Districts-45% from property taxes. However, these districts have lower valuations, and thus, higher tax rates.

Flat grant districts pay teachers more. They spend \$4186 (I assume this is per pupil) more than Foundational school districts. There is a definite correlation between instructional expense and achievement.

55% of African-American students are in low income communities. NCLB punishes poor schools. They are already underfunded. If deemed failing, they are punished by reducing their funds even further.

When students leave school, they find an economy where the wage gap between whites and blacks has never been larger.

The only current hope is in fixing Illinois tax policy.

Madelyn James, Voices For Illinois Children

Ms. James' main point was that the **solution is not simply school-based**. Strong families & communities are integral to closing the gap.

9th Congressional District: 27,330 children in food-insecure homes

10th Congressional District: 61, 880 children in food insecurity.

Preschool funding has been cut consistently since 2009.

Children at risk have these characteristics: low income, mother's education level is low, larger family size, unhealthy environment, low birth rate or premature birth, and no prenatal care.

Chronic stress can stunt physical and cognitive development. Children who are hungry, sick, or frightened are not open to learning in the classroom, no matter the quality of the lesson.

DISCUSSION PERIOD:

Ralph Martire said that he supported the federal government taking more of a role in financing education, since the states have demonstrated an inability to meet the challenge.

He said that a competitive grant structure like "Race to the Top" was self-defeating.

When asked about the American schools' relatively poor performance in comparison to other developed nations, Martire made the following remarks:

- a. All American schools are not broken. You are sitting in one right now that would be the envy of any country. (New Trier West)
- b. Other countries do not have to pay teachers' health care costs, so naturally they need less money to operate.
- c. Traditionally our educational system was staffed with many bright, motivated FEMALE teachers who were locked out of other professions. That is no longer the case. In capitalism, the market determines the price of labor, yet this practice stops at the classroom door.

We need to fix the pipeline that produces teachers. Currently, teachers are the lowest paid professionals. In Finland (held up as #1 system in the world), teachers are highest paid. Once in the pipeline, they receive several years of rigorous training. Ironically, testing has very little emphasis in their system.

*I hope that I have conveyed Martire's points accurately. They will be pertinent when we deal with the Equity & Funding section of the Education study. — Georgia Gebhardt

ILLINOIS LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

Sustainable Food and Water Subcommittee Tours

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2011

9:30 am Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences (CHAS)

3857 W 111th St in Chicago, (111th and Pulaski Rd.)

1:00 pm IIT Institute for Food Safety and Health

6502 South Archer Road, in Bedford Park

RSVP AT LWVFood@gmail.com

The Sustainable Food and Water subcommittee is proud to offer a unique opportunity to members interested in food production. The two venues are about 10 miles apart and transportation is on your own. You may attend either or both tours but **RSVPs are mandatory**.

Morning Tour

CHICAGO HIGH SCHOOL FOR AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES -- RSVP BY NOVEMBER 3

CHAS is a unique high school emphasizing a wide range of ag sciences. This last working farm in Chicago focuses on both crop and livestock production and management including large animals, a closed loop aquaponic system raising tilapia and basil, greenhouses, orchard, and a golf course among other features. See www.chicagoagr.org/ for more information about the school and its curriculum.

The student-led tour runs approximately 45 minutes to an hour. You can visit their farmstand after the tour to purchase items .

Afternoon Tour

IIT INSTITUTE FOR FOOD SAFETY AND HEALTH -- RSVP BY OCTOBER 27

IIT's Institute for Food Safety and Health (<http://www.iit.edu/ifsh/>) is a one-of-a-kind applied food research institute that works with the FDA, USDA, and food processors. It provides stakeholders the opportunity to develop and exchange knowledge, experience, and expertise to address key issues in food safety, food defense, and nutrition. Two examples of recent research include development of a test method for simultaneously detecting up to 40 pesticide residues on produce, and migration of plastic packaging constituents into food. A recently produced report provides an overview of the Institute's work http://www.iit.edu/ifsh/about/pdfs/ifsh_6pager_links_singles.pdf.

Questions? Contact Sheri Latash at LWVFood@gmail.org

WILMETTE LWV OCTOBER CALENDAR

October 21 & 22

Lake Michigan LWV Annual Meeting in Oak Lawn (See separate brochure for details or contact Georgia Gebhardt, gtgebhardt@comcast.net)

October 25

Lunch & Learn with the Cook County LWV, Cook County Forest Preserve District General Superintendent Arnold Randall, at the De Paul Club. (See brochure in this newsletter for details.)

November 14

Role of the Federal Government in Education consensus meeting, 10-2:00 at Wilmette Public Library auditorium. (Lunch provided)

SPLASH!

Lake Michigan League of Women Voters

All League members and friends are invited to the Lake Michigan LWV Annual Meeting on Friday, October 21 and Saturday, October 22, 2011. It will be held at the [Hilton Oak Lawn](#) in Oak Lawn, Illinois. The hotel is conveniently located near I-294, southwest of Chicago.

Our annual business meeting is the reason for getting together, but we also have many educational activities and knowledgeable speakers planned. Please join us as we become better informed advocates for Lake Michigan.

- “Toxic to Treasures” Trolley Tour of the Lake Calumet area
 - Todd Main, Deputy Director, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, will be our keynote speaker at dinner Friday night, speaking on Invasive Species and the Millennium Reserve System
 - Discussion of How to be an Effective Advocate
 - Debra Shore, Commissioner, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District, will discuss sewer overflows in Cook County, IL
 - Judy Beck, Lake Michigan Manager, US EPA, will report on the State of Lake Michigan
 - Walking Tour of Beaubien Woods, beneficiary of Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funding.
- Even if you cannot attend all of these exciting events, please join us for those that work with your schedule! The [registration form](#) lists several meal plan options.

Additional information about the event is available on the [2011 Annual Meeting Materials](#) page. Registrants are responsible for their own hotel reservations. The discounted hotel rate has been extended. Call the Oak Lawn Hilton at 1-800-315-1058 and ask for the “League of Women Voters” block rate

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION?

SHOULD THERE BE NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AT PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

Our local league is participating in the national study addressing the role of the federal government in public education. To aid us in discussing this issue and reaching consensus, various league members will present information culled from research and interviews regarding the history of the federal government's role in public education, funding and equity, and the common core standards.

Education Study Consensus Meeting
Monday, November 14
10-2
Wilmette Public Library - Meeting Room

All League Members are encouraged to attend this important Consensus Meeting. If you would like to familiarize yourself with the study prior to the meeting, all background and study information is available at <http://tinyurl.com/lwvEdstudy>.

League of Women Voters of Cook County

Cook County Chief of Staff “STARs” at Lunch & Learn

Kurt Summers, Chief of Staff to Cook County President Toni Preckwinkle, was the featured speaker at the summer Lunch & Learn with the League sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Cook County. A sell-out group heard about some of the challenges that faced the new administration when President Preckwinkle took office last December, as well as about the new quarterly management report recently released by the County called “STAR” (Set Targets * Achieve Results).

Challenges

President Preckwinkle assumed the presidency of a county that had no approved budget, even though we were already 5 days into the new fiscal year. For the first 50 days, Mr. Summers said, “it was all about the budget” and trying to close a \$1/2 billion hole in a \$3.5 billion county budget. This was done in the closing hours of the mandated deadline at the end of February. And, while budget review and negotiations were going on, at the President’s urging, the Board passed ordinances reducing the County’s share of the sales tax by ¼ cent by January 2012 and again in 2013, effectively rolling back the increase that had been passed under the prior administration. This sales tax reduction, which fulfilled a campaign promise, will, of course, produce more budget challenges for the future.

But the greatest challenge, said Mr. Summers, is the structure of the Executive Branch of Cook County government. While the United States government has one chief executive, in Cook County government we have 12 separately elected executives, including the Sheriff, State’s Attorney, Chief Judge, Assessor, Clerk, and Recorder of Deeds, as well as the President. President Preckwinkle, accordingly, cannot simply issue an edict and expect all the other elected officials in the Executive Branch to simply fall in line. Often much time must be spent in negotiation and persuasion.

Goal to Improve Transparency and Accountability

Mr. Summers told us that one of the chief goals of President Preckwinkle is to have true Transparency and Accountability in county government. In addition to issuing a Transition Report, the administration published a “100-day report card” and plans to issue a one year report card this December, looking at how many of the goals in the Transition Report have been accomplished.

For the first time, a Preliminary Budget for 2012 has been posted on the County’s web site, and a public hearing to elicit views on budget priorities has been set for August 25. The Cook County League plans to participate (look for more on this in future updates from the County League). The President’s proposed budget for 2012 will follow after this public input and is expected to be submitted to the Cook County Board before the end of October. (The new fiscal year begins December 1.)

The centerpiece of the new administration’s efforts to improve the working of the County across all areas is the STAR report that will be issued quarterly. The Cook County Board passed an ordinance requiring all County agencies to set goals, establish measurements in order to evaluate how well the goals are being met, and to then provide data on those measurements. STAR is to be used to create efficiencies, improve services, ask for feedback, and lower the cost of government. In addition to each department participating separately, for the first time, the County has set goals that all agencies are expected to work towards in the following areas that cut across the separately elected County executives’ domains: Finance and Administration, Healthcare, Public Safety, Property & Taxation, and Economic Development.

You can see the STAR Report and comment on the goals, measurements, and results by going to the Cook County web site: www.cookcountyil.gov. Check it out, along with the Preliminary Budget and the Transition Report and 100-Day Report Card.

The Cook County League is already at work on the **next Lunch & Learn event scheduled for Tuesday, October 25**, which will feature Cook County Forest Preserve General Superintendent Arnold Randall as the guest speaker. Look for more details on the next page.



**LUNCH & LEARN WITH
The League of Women Voters
of Cook County**

a series of fundraising luncheons featuring speakers
talking about different aspects of Cook County government

Our next speaker:

**Cook County Forest Preserve District
General Superintendent Arnold Randall**

Tuesday, October 25, 11:30 am to 1 pm

**DePaul Club, DePaul University Center, 11th floor
1 E. Jackson** (corner of State Street and Jackson), **Chicago**
(walk through the Barnes & Noble store to reach the elevators to the 11th floor)

cost: \$30 per person (includes boxed lunch and hot and cold drinks)

Proceeds benefit The League of Women Voters of Cook County

LWVCC Oct. 25 Lunch & Learn with the League – Reservations due by Tuesday, October 18

Name(s): _____

Address: _____ City/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

League (if applicable): _____

Please select your sandwich choice (if more than one person for this reservation, please identify how many of each below and identify who gets which on other side):

___ chicken salad ___ turkey ___ vegetarian

Enclosed is a check for \$ _____ (_____ reservations @ \$30 each) made out to **The League of Women Voters of Cook County**

*Please mail this completed form and check to
Donna Moore c/o League of Women Voters, P.O. Box 801, Flossmoor, IL 60422
Questions? Call Donna at 708-798-8867*